

Early Settlement

Indians living in northeastern North Carolina at the time of permanent white settlement linguistically belonged to the Algonquian tradition (see figure 2-1) with the exception of the Tuscarora and the Meherrin who linguistically belonged to the Iroquoian tradition. The Algonquians in North Carolina, the southernmost of that language group on the North American continent, lived in an area extending from the Virginia border southward to Bogue Inlet and from the Outer Banks as far inland as present Plymouth, Washington, and New Bern. The tribes, within this linguistic tradition included the Pasquotank, Yeopim, Poteskeet, Chowanoc, Machapunga, Bay or Bear River, Pamlico, Hatteras, Neusioc, and possibly the Coree. Such tribes were small in number and dominated by the more powerful, numerous, and warlike Tuscarora who lived just to the west of the Algonquians and to a great extent controlled the Algonquians. The Meherrin, who lived mainly in Virginia but who moved into North Carolina under pressure of the northern government, were confined to the east bank of the Chowan River as early as 1676.

Early European contact with the aboriginal inhabitants of North Carolina resulted in an exchange of weapons, living habits, and language. However, the whites quickly overwhelmed the Algonquians. In fact, the rapid disintegration of the Indian way of life and the astonishing numerical decline in aboriginal populations have been the principal themes of North Carolina Indian history. Contributing greatly to the decimation of the Indians were disease and warfare. An epidemic in 1695 devastated the Pamlico tribe. The Chowanoc were destroyed by war in 1677. While the Iroquoian tribes held out for a longer period, they were defeated in the Tuscarora War of 1711-1714, which eventually resulted in the virtual disappearance of the Indians from northeastern North Carolina.

In the modern era, the aboriginal population was supplemented and then supplanted by Europeans who sighted and explored the Outer Banks at least as early as Giovanni da Verrazzano's expedition of 1524. Subsequent European contacts with North Carolina's coast involved the Spanish, including a probable landing in present Currituck in 1566. The region lured Europeans who thought that North Carolina sounds were either the Pacific Ocean or the means by which to reach the Pacific. These early explorers felt the sounds provided the opportunity of realizing Columbus' dream of finding a water route to the Orient. However, by the last quarter of the sixteenth century this notion had been dispelled and the search for a "Northwest Passage" had shifted to the Chesapeake Bay in Virginia.

Desire for wealth and fame motivated the Englishman, Walter Raleigh, to obtain a patent from Queen Elizabeth I in 1584 to allow him to colonize any land not possessed by Christian princes or inhabited by Christian people. A